



4985
The Certainty of Death, and the Limitedness of the Season of Grace, with the Importance of improving this limited Season, illustrated.

A

S E R M O N

Preached at PALMER:

Occasioned by the DEATH of

Dr. Abner Stone,

Who died DECEMBER 1st. 1773.

In the 25th. Year of his Age.

B Y

MOSES BALDWIN, A. M.

Pastor of the CHURCH in PALMER.

"The Voice said, Cry, and he said, What shall I cry? All Flesh is Grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the Flower of the Field. The Grass withereth, the Flower fadeth. Isai. 40. 6. 7.
"Remember now thy Creator in the Days of thy Youth, while the evil Days come not, nor the Years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no Pleasure in them." Eccle. 12. 1.

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A

FUNERAL SERMON.

ECCLESIASTES IX. 10.

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.

☉ X X X X X ☉ MEN and Brethren, do we not by long observation, as well as by recent proofs, learn the uncertainty and emptiness of all the enjoyments of the present state ? Has it not been proved out, that happiness, complete happiness, is not the portion of any of the children of men under any circumstance, or in any situation in this life ? The world, with all its glory, never was made fully to satisfy the desires of a rational

tional and an immortal soul. We may well believe this is not the place of our rest, when we find how losses, crosses and disappointments, fall to the share of every character of men. We have good authority to assert, that none of any character are exempted from trials in this world of sin. All things come alike to all, there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good, the clean and unclean ; ver. 2. context. This may teach us, not only that compleat rest and happiness is not to be looked for in this world, but that mens internal state is not determined by external providential dispensations, whether they are prosperous or adverse. As all men are partakers in sin, and alike subject to adverse providences ; so they are all alike subject to death. This must be a change very important, very interesting to all, as now they enter the world of spirits, and are unalterably fixed, according to the deeds done in the body. The time of life, as momentary and uncertain as it is, is the probationary and preparatory time, the only season which men have given them, to do the great work, which they have to do for God, their souls and eternity. If the great and necessary work of this season be not done in time, it never can be done. If the new birth be not wrought, and faith of a divine operation be not given ; if the salvation of the soul be not secured, whilst this day of grace lasts, all prospect of mercy is at an end. May not the words of the text now be introduced as a proof ? " For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." No work respecting this or the coming world, the grave is a state of inactivity ; no device, no devising there how to obtain the blessings of time or eternity ; no knowledge of things past, present or
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to come ; no wisdom of a worldly or spiritual nature there ; the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten, ver. 5. context ; there is no faith, nor hope in the cold and silent grave ; nor are there any acts of pardon passed there. Since this is the case, how very pertinent, very important the exhortation, " whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ?" Farther to illustrate the words chosen to entertain you on this mournful occasion, I shall show,

I. That all men are going to the grave.

II. That when they come to the grave, their working and preparation time for another world will be at an end.

III. That it is therefore duty, and reasonable for men earnestly to be engaged in this preparation work, while the day of grace lasts.

I. All men are going to the grave. This is a truth evident from those words, " For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living." Job 30. 23. Death came by sin, and since all men have sinned, death is their appointed and inevitable lot. Rom. 5. 12. with Heb. 9. 27. The last enemy is an universal enemy. The righteous and the wicked, the best of saints and the vilest of sinners can obtain no discharge in that war. The strong and firm, the young and gay, must return to dust, when called, as well as the old and decrepid worn out with age. Neither honor, nor wisdom, nor wealth will avail to purchase a reprieve from the grave. Princes, though called gods, must die as well as other men. All the wisdom of Solomon

mon could not find out a way to escape the arrests of death, nor could the whole world redeem Alexander the great, so that he might live forever, and not see corruption. The skill of the wisest and most able physician cannot find out a remedy that will keep himself when his appointed time is come ; when his days are finished, he must go, prepared or unprepared, willing or unwilling. The truth is illustrated that all men are going to the grave. And what a sad reflection must this be to all, was it not for the revelation, belief and prospect of a glorious resurrection to the righteous, who shall arise to everlasting life ? Which can be no relief or consolation to the wicked, who must arise to shame and everlasting contempt. I pass on to say,

II. That when men come to the grave, their working and preparation time for another world will be at an end. There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave. Infinite wisdom has given man a fit season, an appointed opportunity to accomplish the great business for which he was sent into the world. This St. Paul calls the accepted time and day of salvation. This fit season is the day of youth, the morning of life, the moulding age, the time in which persons are generally formed for the true service of God in this world, and for glory in the world to come, if ever they be. The time also, whilst the means and instruments of conversion are enjoyed, and the Spirit of God is co-operating with the external means of grace, is the fit day for salvation concerns. This fit season is called a day, an accepted day, that probationers for the future state may know that it is but a day, a limited day, a day that will come to an end, a day followed with

with a night when no man can work. Joh. 9. 4. We do not need a train of arguments to prove that there will be a period to the time of youth, that the external means of grace, with the co-operating influence of the divine Spirit, are not forever to be enjoyed; we have done with all the times and means of salvation when the night of death comes; here is the full and final period to all preparation for the future world. "In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall lie"; "it is appointed to men once to die, but after this the judgment." No sooner is the vital union betwixt soul and body dissolved, but the matter is finally settled, the state of the soul is unalterably determined; all in union with Christ, all in whom the temper and spirit of Jesus are wrought, immediately ascend to the paradise of God, where they have a fixed abode for eternity, in fulness of joys and pleasures for evermore: But on the other hand, all that die in unregeneracy, in unbelief, and so without special interest in the blood and merits of Christ, are no sooner dead, but they are eternally lost without any hope of remedy.

How very evident is the truth now asserted in the case of good Lazarus, and the wicked rich glutton? Luk. 16. 19, &c. No sooner is good Lazarus dead, but he is conveyed by the blessed angels into Abraham's bosom, a state of compleat glory and blessedness; and no sooner is the rich glutton dead, but he lifts up his eyes in hell being in torments. The state of the one and the other is unalterable; there is a great gulph, by reason of which there is no possibility of passing from one state to the other; the irreversible sentence of God is gone forth, so that the state of Lazarus is pronounced forever blessed, and

the state of Dives miserable, forever so without any ease or mitigation, not so much as one drop of water can he have to dip the tip of his finger in to cool his tongue, though his cries be never so loud and distressing. This now is a just representation of the righteous and wicked at death, which I humbly conceive fully proves, that when men come to the grave, their working and preparation time for another world will be at an end ; that if the great and necessary work for their souls be ever done, it must be done in time or remain forever undone ; that if ever they experience a work of grace on their hearts, ever become new creatures in Christ, ever are brought into a state of grace and favour with God, and are qualified for heaven, it must be in time, or they forever perish in the ruins of their apostacy without help. I come now to show,

III. That it is duty for men earnestly to be engaged in preparation work for eternity, while the day of grace lasts. This I believe to be the mind and will of the Lord and maker of the world, that men earnestly attend to the future and eternal welfare of the soul, and expressed in the text, "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." It is true mens utmost diligence cannot merit or entitle them to salvation, cannot lay God under any obligation to bestow it, their sinful doings cannot recommend them to God, salvation is all of grace ; but notwithstanding this, God has appointed means to work faith in us, whereby we become united with Christ, and partake of the benefits of redemption : And it is evident that God has owned and blessed the means of his appointment for this purpose in thousands of instances. Whilst therefore I am taught
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these things in the bible, I must believe it an indispensable duty for men, "to seek first, and above all things the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" "to strive to enter into the strait gate;" to pray God, if perhaps the thoughts of their hearts may be forgiven them;" to watch at wisdom's gates, and wait at the posts of her doors." And it is no argument with me that sinners are not bound in duty as rational beings to attend to the means of heaven's appointment, because they cannot do it without sin; for if this was a good reason, the same would hold good in respect of the saints, "for there is no man that liveth and sinneth not." It is my candid tho't, that the one thing needful, the future and eternal welfare of the soul, ought to be the one thing, the one great concern of both saints and sinners; to press home this I shall offer a few things by way of argumentation. Hence let me say,

1. As the present state is the only season we have to secure salvation in, so it is reasonable that we earnestly improve this season for this purpose. Is not this the very thing for which the wise man so urges us to do whatever our hands find to do with our might? Is this not the reason which our Lord gave, why he must work in good earnest whilst the day lasted, because the night cometh when no man can work? Since no gospel repentance is to be given in the grave, how reasonable that men should be earnest to obtain it before they come there? Since we are never more to have sabbaths and sermons after this state to improve for our souls good, how reasonable that we make the best improvement of them, whilst we have them? Will ministers no more after the present state be sent to plead with men to be reconciled

ciled to God, with tenderness to beseech them to accept of Christ and salvation with him? Will they no more by and by make any overtures of peace, no more manage a treaty with sinners of men, how reasonable that they earnestly attend to the ministry of reconciliation, whilst it is continued, especially since faith cometh by hearing, and the gospel is made the power of God unto salvation?

2. The shortness of this only fit season of grace should plead with rational men, earnestly to attend to whatever their hands find to do in it. Well is it said, "Brethren, the time is short;" well is it said, "that our life is but a vapour, which appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away," when the length of a man's days are compared with time itself, more especially when compared with a long eternity. "Man is but of few days, he cometh forth like a flower and is cut down, he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not." How reasonable now that man be concerned and engaged, that the work to be done for his soul in this short span, this inch or two, this moment of time, be quickly done, especially seeing there is so small a portion of this span, that he can be more immediately engaged in his soul concerns, considering the necessary time to be employed in making provision for the body, and to be spent in sleep?

3. The great uncertainty to man of the time of his life, should move him, without delay, to give diligence to make sure his everlasting interest. Who knows what a day, an hour, a minute, or a moment may bring forth? Who can tell at what hour the Son of man will come to call us hence? Who knows
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where he shall be to morrow, in time or eternity ? Can the youth say whether he shall be called from this mortal stage while young, while in the bloom, or whether he shall live to see old age ? Let every mortal say, whether the time of life, all earthly enjoyments, all opportunities for another world, do not stand upon terms of the utmost uncertainty with us ? And then say, whether the call is not loud and urgent, to do whatever our hands find to do in this uncertain season ?

4. The dreadful consequence of being unprepared for death when it comes, should be an argument with men to press them to seek preparation in due season. Though some men may be so stupid and hardned, who have no part in Christ, as to have no bands in their death, as to dream of safety, until they awake in a state of unutterable and endless despair ; yet how shocking must the near approach of death be to the person unprepared, under a sense of his immediate danger ? Let man believe he must now bid an adieu to the world, with all its enjoyments, and go to judgment, and really believe that he is under the guilt of all his sins ; and must not amazement and horror seize him ? Let him reflect that his precious day of grace has been spent in sin, in vanity, in neglect of the great salvation, in pursuing things but comparatively trifling, and find that he has made no provision for a sick and dying day ; what anguish must his poor soul be in ? When he finds how little, very little reason he has to hope for mercy upon a sick and dying bed ; what ! O what would he now be disposed to give that his mispent time might be recalled ! How free would his little all in the world now go, would this procure him a part in Christ, or
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only a reprieve a while from the grave! Who can tell the pain and agony of the man, who in his last moments looks up and beholds an angry God, down and beholds hell in all its horror ready for him, forward and beholds nothing but that fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries of God? Now can rational men take a view of a graceless sinner thus launching out of time into eternity, and not see the importance of being prepared for death by times, not see what dangerous consequence, a neglect of salvation in the proper season of it, is attended with?

5. The blessedness of having our work well done for eternity, when death comes, should prevail with men to be earnest in doing what their hands find to do. What inexpressible joy and comfort must it yield the good man, can he but look back in his last moments, and be able to reflect, not only on his concern and engagedness for the salvation of his soul, but upon his closure with Christ? What blessedness now can he discern times, when he has had grounds to believe that he has had the sealings, and testimony of the Spirit of God, with his spirit, that he was a child of God, when he could discern the temper and spirit of Christ, days and years wherein he has had a prevailing love to God, a prevailing and heavenly frame and disposition of mind, a sacred regard to all God's precepts, and an hatred of every evil and false way, how he has been enabled from time to time to give up himself and his all to God, and how he has enjoyed the peculiar manifestations of divine love? May we not in such a case suppose, while he is musing that the fire of divine love will burn in his heart, that he will have "Hope as an anchor of his soul sure and steadfast;" that he will be actually ready

ready for his departure ; that he will have a prospect of heaven so clear and bright, not only as to the felicity of it, but his title to it, that with St. Paul, he may triumph, " O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? " Will death now be a terror ? Nay rather appear with the lovely face of an angel. It will now be bid welcome as the messenger come to call him from this land of sin, sighs and tears, to the joy and rest which remains for the people of God. Now seeing our calling and election is made sure in a way of diligence, how weighty is this argument to excite men to be earnest to obtain grace, and to be made ripe for glory, " that they may come to their grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season ? " I may add—

6. The example of Christ's earnestness in pursuing the salvation of men as an argument. I must work, saith he, while it is day. Now shall the blessed Redeemer, be so earnest to work out redemption for us, and shall not we, whose everlasting salvation is deeply concerned herein, be earnest too ? I may add—

7. The eagerness of satan to ruin our dear souls, as a motive to us to be earnest for salvation. Is satan, the restless enemy of God and man, unwearied in his pains to destroy us, soul and body forever ; and shall we not be as earnest to defeat his designs, to escape the ruin he is plotting for us, and to obtain salvation, which he is resolute if possible to prevent ? I now hasten to the

I M P R O V E M E N T.

1. Is death the inevitable lot and portion of the living, the short day of life the only season allotted us to obtain peace and favor with God ; what matter of
reproof

reproof doth this discourse hold up to the graceless, careless, delaying part of my hearers? You, sirs, are fast going to the grave. Your time, never to be recalled, is fast hastening to its end. You must soon be fixed in an unalterable estate. Your great works for God and your souls remains yet not done. Every night when you lie down, you are liable to awake in utter despair; yea, every moment you are liable to awake in utter despair; yea, every moment you are liable to endless, easeless and remediless wo; and are you yet crying, a little more sleep and slumber? Do you see old and young fall around you, and are you yet boasting of to-morrow? O stupid and unwise! "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon: Lest the daughter of the Philistines rejoice, lest the uncircumcised triumph." Lest the deists of the day boast, lest the heathen say, your divine revelation, your christian religion is but a mere sham.

2. Are you all, old and young going to the grave? Do all things stand upon terms of the utmost uncertainty with you? Then sirs, place not your happiness on any thing of a mortal and perishing nature. All such happiness is precarious. All happiness, built on any thing below the skies, is short lived, as uncertain as short. Let the object of your affections be never so dear, doth he appear to you like an angel in an earthly shape? Do you begin to clasp this object in your arms as though you had found something immortal below the sun, as though you had found a creature that should never see death? Lo! he dies in your very embraces, his lips are sealed, his tongue is silent, his breath is gone, his beauty is marr'd, you are awake and find all your expectations of earthly bliss, were but a dream. Your earthly joys are in a moment

moment fled ; yea, they are turned into tears, sighs and groans. Let this teach you one and all not to place your happiness on any thing that is mortal.

3. Let me now proceed to apply this discourse, with special reference to the righteous providence of God, which has this day called us out. Death has been the subject of our meditations, and death we have had in a very affecting point of view before our eyes. The death of whom ? Of Dr. Stone ; may I not say, a youth dear to and respected by us ? Infinite wisdom has righteously called him away, he is cut down in all the flower and bloom of youth, even at his entrance upon the stage of action among us, whose continuance appeared to be of very great importance. May we not, yea ought we not to mourn when God in his righteous providence thus removes our dear friends ? Though they have lived their day, and done their work, yet it is duty to mourn, while we are submissive to the will of God. Did not Jesus, when he heard that Lazarus was dead, whom he loved, and saw the mourners weeping, groan in spirit and weep with them ? May we not all then upon this occasion drop a tear and mourn in the undissembled language of him, who said, " Lover and friend hast thou put far from us, and our acquaintance into darkness ? " Come then, brethren, come all ye people of Palmer, come old and young, and mourn with me. Yea, come ye neighbouring towns, come all that have partook of the benefit of his skill ; come all, who hoped, under God, that he would long be an instrument of great good, and mourn with us, who feel the weight of the sudden and surprizing blow : Yea, let all far and near, who shall hear this tale of mortality, who shall hear of the death of a youth

youth so promising, mourn and admire with us the mystery of divine providence. And now let all acquainted with him from his childhood up, impartially speak, whether his intellectual endowments were not superior, his natural temper sweet, ingenuity and affability true and distinguishing branches in his character? How were these natural accomplishments heightened by his acquaintance with the learned languages, and other branches of literature? As to his religious sentiments, he appeared to me to have a peculiar affection for the doctrines of grace, and he professed to me to have years ago experienced them in the power and efficacy of them upon his own heart; and with some of his last apparent rational expressions told me, "he had a favourable hope that his peace was made with God, and that the future welfare of his soul was secure." Whether he gave good grounds for charity or not, let his deportment, let his moral conduct speak. Let the several towns where he lived say, whether the course of his walk was not consistent with the profession he made? Let all say, whether he did not appear to have a regard to the religion of Jesus? And whether he did not give as constant attendance on public worship, as the duty of his calling would admit? Let persons, his patients, recovered from dangerous sickness say, whether his counsels, the language of his lips did not sound as though dictated by something above nature? Let the scholars taught by him, who have heard his prayers to heaven, and had many serious and solemn counsels from him say, whether there did not seem some good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel? Let youth in whatever company you saw him say, whether his conduct was not exemplary, decent and modest? Let the youth more especially
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under his care say, whether by his steady, uniform deportment, and by the counsels which he gave you, he did not ever carry a conviction in your breasts, that he had at heart the honor of God, the interest of religion, and your temporal and eternal good ? In a word, I appeal to the family where was his last abode, and from whence he was removed into the world of spirits, to say, whether his prayers in the family, when the head of the family was occasionally absent, whether his counsels to the children, his conversation and walk ever since you knew him, were not such as made you entertain charity, that he had made choice of Christ as his prince and Savior, as his portion and felicity forever ? As a physician, let his great success, with his extensive practice ; yea with these let physicians of his acquaintance say, whether, considering his youth and advantages, he was not judicious, skilful and able ?

And now was the Doctor deserving such a character, must not the loss to the public be great ? We are all to a greater or less degree doubtless affected with the stroke. But none I presume so tenderly feel the loss, as the parents of the deceased. Permit me, dear friends, to say, your son, your promising son, your first born, the desire of your eyes, and the joy of your hearts, is gone, his work is soon done, and providence has called him hence. I heartily condole with you, I sincerely sympathize with you in your sorrows, while I say, " it is the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes." Should not this be the dutiful submissive language of your hearts, " the Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord !" Has God (as you say) given you the comfort of comforts grounds to think your son has

gone to rest ? Doth he give you hope amidst your sorrows ? Is he not allsufficient, able to make up the loss, and to supply the place of a son in enjoyments more substantial and lasting ? Are you not now taught by the failing of the stream, to repair to the fountain ? Are you not now taught, " not to set your affections on things below, but on things above, where Christ is at the right hand of God ? " Do you not now learn the evil of sin, the cause of death, with the emptiness of your dearest enjoyments ? And now could I make the surviving brethren and sisters at so great a distance hear, I would essay to lift up my voice like a trumpet, and sound the melancholly news to their ears, and say, your brother, your elder brother is dead, and though he is dead, yet let him speak by his death in such language as this, O " boast not of to-morrow, for you know not what a day or an hour may bring forth ! O boast not of your youth, " health and strength, for all flesh is grass ! " Mind the great concern of your souls in season ; whatever you neglect, neglect not Christ and the great salvation ; whatever your hands find to do, do it with your might, for you are going to the grave ; be earnest to obtain preparation for another world while the day lasts ; for " when the night of death comes, no man can work."

Let Physicians, the most skillful as well as others, come and behold in this glass of mortality, that you are mortal, must die in spite of all your skill ; attend the present doleful sound from the tomb, meditate the day when you must take your final leave of time and be numbred with the dead, and amidst all your care and pains for the lives of your fellow men, forget not the end of all the living, view the several things held
up

up in the character of the deceased that are agreeable with the present subject upon mortality, as incentives to activity and diligence in your work, especially in the great concern of your souls salvation while your day lasts. But while I speak to others let me not totally forget the youth bereft of their instructor and guide. You, dear sirs, dear youth, have lost a sincere and faithful friend, your loss is great, it is an humbling passage in providence : But when you mourn your great loss, bless God that you were under his conduct so long ; recollect the good counsel and advice he gave you ; set his example before you for imitation in those instances wherein it is duty to follow his steps ; and will not this be the most ready way to obtain that blessing which will make up your loss ? Let me now particularly apply myself to the rising generation. O my dear youth, have you not just now been conversant with an instance of mortality, that will at last bring you to this conclusion, That whatsoever your hands find to do, you will do it with your might ? Your fellow youth, your sincere friend, your physician, your companion has took his final leave of you. No more in the world will you see his face, his probationary season is truly at an end, What now is the voice of providence to you ? “ Be ye also ready, for in such a day and hour as ye think not, the son of man will come.” Were you now in the state of the dead, what do you conceive would be the eternal condition of your souls ? Perhaps many of you may reply, a state of unutterable wo. Don’t then the present call in providence, with the voice of the word and reason, say that you ought now to be earnest to secure the salvation of your souls ; that the present day of youth, the precious season of grace should be dear to you, and be improved to the
best

best purpose ? Do you say yea ? Then how inexcusable and speechless must you be finally left, if after all you carelessly neglect your better part and perish in your sins ? Do you not know, that while any of you spend away your day in carnal security, and have no interest in Christ and his salvation, how your case is fearful and dangerous ? Don't you know that you are sinners by nature and practice, children of wrath, legally and spiritually dead as well as others, liable to a temporal and an eternal death, that you must soon, unless you have faith in Christ, and become new creatures, bid farewell to all things here, and to all hopes of salvation forever ? Will, dare any of you then put off your great concern ? I might invite you to early seek acquaintance with God and grace, to prepare you for a better world, by setting before you the superior glory and happiness of a religious life to a life of sin, might lead you to take a view of the crown of glory, the inconceivable and everlasting felicity, the end of a life of godliness ; but let me only add, that I do conceive it to be extremely hazardous to delay in hopes of obtaining mercy in your last moments. May I not without limiting the grace of God, say, I believe it a very rare thing that ever any one obtained mercy at the close of the twelfth hour. The example of the converted thief, I am sure never was left upon record to encourage persons to put off their great concern with this presumption, that they may obtain mercy upon a death-bed. I do fear that such who delay with this presumption, will perish without mercy. The instance of the converted thief was extraordinary ; in this case Christ gave a display of the power of his God-head on the cross, there will never be the like occasion again, the thief perhaps had never before any knowledge of Christ, nor offer of mercy.

mercy by Christ made him ; the case of this thief ought not then to be looked upon as being parrallel with yours, and so no grounds to put off and think you shall obtain mercy at last because he did. Behold and mark the case of the other thief, how he was hardened to the last ; mark the desperateness of the case of the foolish virgins, who delayed until the midnight cry was made ; mark well the word of God, how when you have gone on in defiance of his counsels and reproofs, how when you cry in your distress, he will not answer, but will laugh at your calamity ; mark how common it is for persons to be bereft of reason in their last sickness, and so to go out of the world, and say whether your call be not immediate to prepare to meet the Lord, to attend in this your early and best day to the things which belong to your peace ? Finally, let all, old as well as young, attend this day to the voice of Providence, and give yourselves no rest until you find it in Christ, the only hope and help for ruined man. Give diligence to see that your great work is well done, that your calling and election are made sure, that when the midnight cry is made " behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him," you may say, " come Lord Jesus, come quickly, amen." May the Lord crown this feeble attempt to improve his providence with his own blessing, and to his name be glory and praise forever and ever !

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